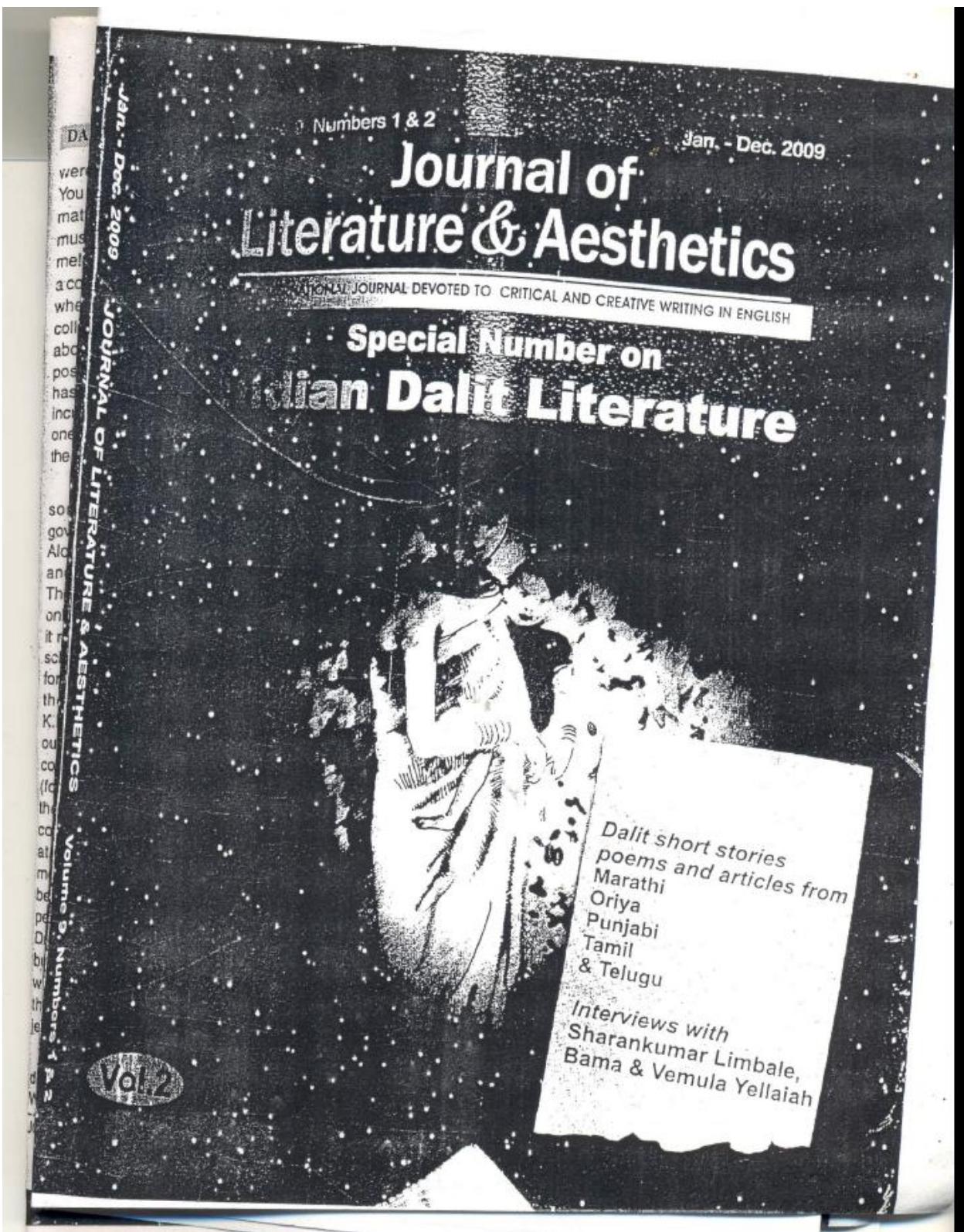


That's all... What More is to be Desired?

By Dr.Darla Ravi Kumar's Telugu Short Story,

Translated by Dr. V.V.B.Ramarao



Dr.Darla Ravi Kumar's Short Story "*That's all... What More is to be Desired?*"

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That's all . . . What More is to be Desired?



DARLA RVIKUMAR
Trans. Dr. V. V. B. Rama Rao

It was getting on to eight-thirty in the night.

I was walking to and fro, so tense, I don't know why. I have my cell phone in my hand. Waiting for that to ring, looking at the clock on the wall. No ring yet. Having nothing to do, I turned on the TV I was switching channels watching nothing. No ring yet. It's past eight thirty. At home, me and solitude and nothing else at all. My fingers switching the channels suddenly stopped. The words from the TV caught my ear:

"None among us is getting employment. For Dalit couples and many of those in their families are getting jobs. These reservations have come to be a curse for the likes of us. . ." Thus someone was going on. Meanwhile the cell phone rang and I heard on picking the phone, "That's all . . . what more is desired . . . If possible a few words... If available a cup of tea." I am fond of this ring tone! In that voice lots of affection and then that sweetness in those little

questions. That's what enchants me,

I got up quickly, switched off the TV and stood at the roadside my eyes avidly looking at all the buses and autos that stopped nearby . . .

Half an hour passed off. What could have happened! I searched myself for my cell phone to give a ring but I realized that I started in a hurry saying "I'm right there."

What could have happened! I dropped Dayamani, my wife, and remembering that at the railway station in the morning and while returning happened to witness an accident. A shiver ran down my spine. Ten years ago there were not many buses or autos plying on this road except for a bus in the morning and another in the evening. But after the Hi Tech city came into being suddenly this area became very busy and crowded. . .

My tension was mounting. Meanwhile, a car drew up very near and in that my colleague Dr Srirama Sarma and his family

DARLA RAVIKUMAR

were sitting. "Hello! David garu! Still here! You must be waiting for your missus. It doesn't matter if you come even a little late. You must come to the function got up to felicitate me!" So saying, he drove off. Besides being a colleague he stays in Prasanthi Apartments where we stay too. We work in the same college. He happens to be senior to me by about five years. Owing to filling up backlog posts, I could get a permanent post. But he has been continuing only as a temporary incumbent. It has been his own trust that one day he'd be in a permanent post, though the college was run by a private management.

Earlier too so many got settled. With some changes coming in policy, the government had to fill the backlog vacancies. Along with me two others also got absorbed and we became permanent employees. Though we continued as research scholars only, we were no longer young. We thought it respectable to be called senior research scholars than be known as unemployed and for that reason we used to put on hold our theses without submitting them. After K.R.Narayan garu became the President of our country, new rules emerged for private colleges getting aid. Unless backlog posts (for the reserved categories) were filled up, the government said that grant for private colleges would be withheld. For that reason at least some senior research scholars like me had been absorbed. With that we have been drawing three times more salary than people senior to us. This those couldn't relish. Dr Sarma garu got his Ph.D. five years earlier, but still is a part-time hand. "It's our fate: where are jobs for the likes of us! You are the blessed sons," he used to vent out jealousy though smilingly!

Before backlog and special recruitment drives, why didn't they take any of us earlier? Were they not good enough even for part-

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time jobs? I used to feel like asking

But I used to smile away. Though his salary was low, he used to earn good money by practising astrology and had a lot of clientele. He used to be busy with weddings and ceremonies and writing down addresses of felicitations. Income from these came to several times the income from teaching part-time. Apart from that he had ancestral landed property too. Though they did no farming, they used to get all kinds of produce delivered comfortably home regularly without having to

Not that alone: his wife too worked in a private college as a lecturer. Even though my wife's is a government job, Dr Sarma's wife gets more and then she needn't go to another place since the college is in this very locality. However hard I tried, they were telling me that there were no vacancies in any place nearer than the one she worked in. But vacancies had been found to places nearer for non-Dalits. The pranks of these transfers are known to those powers that be or to corruption.

Vehicles have been moving fast blowing horns in the way they liked. My thoughts have been racing somehow. She hasn't returned. I had half a mind to go back to fetch my mobile phone. But then I told myself "If she should come and should not find me! She would be pained. Why go and come back! But it's only half a kilo-metre. But how would she feel if she doesn't find me!"

My brain is getting heated up.

I saw on the TV a police announcement that a terrorist related to the attacks in Mumbai had been caught in Hyderabad while on a shooting spree and that two more suspects had been apprehended...

She hasn't come yet. I thought of a

collection-box call – but then the locality is a wilderness in a great metropolis. One has to walk half a kilo-metre to find one. It'd be better to fetch my phone from home.

I pulled out a tablet for my B.P. from the pocket and looked around for water. Finding no other way I popped it in my mouth. Even before one turned forty, one is falling victim to B.P. and Sugar. Can't the tablet go down without water? Autos are coming but not my wife. Dr. Sarma's felicitation function must have begun.

In my childhood too I used to wait and wait for my parents to get back from work. They would come sometime very late and feed me waking me up from my sleep. They would thrust something in my hand - a ball of baked corn or some sweet made of flour and sugar. They used to say that I would go to sleep just munching them. It had not been possible to see them in the morning either: they would leave early in the morning even before I woke up. Now, my wife too is like that! Some times she used to talk in her sleep: "Is it day light already! The train must have left."

I don't know whether the tablet has gone down but felt like getting a little choked. I am not able to see anything except passengers getting off and into vehicles. Suddenly there is the sound of a big thud. A man riding a Hero-Honda, while trying to overtake, hit a scooterist.

I rushed to the spot. The scooterist and the pillion rider were both hurt. While I was going to tie banners in connection with my research supervisor's felicitation, a scooterist hit me like this. My supervisor's husband was driving the scooter. I couldn't get up. Someone took me in a car to the hospital. They took an x-ray: I was in the hospital for two days. They said it was not a serious injury though the spine and kidney

were involved and assured me that medicines would help recovery. But I had a suspicion after looking into my x-ray. From the very next year, I had developed diabetes. The doctors would know better about the connection.

Worried, I made the injured rise and took him to a side. Meanwhile the Honda drivers abused the scooterist and went away. The injured managed to go away on the same scooter after some time.

My wife has not come yet. What could have happened! It was getting on to nine o' clock. The cooking needs to be looked to and she wouldn't allow me to do the job. The vessels have to be scrubbed first. The house needs to be swept. The food has to be cooked. There are clothes to be washed. Doing all this would take more than two hours. Then gulping a few grains going to sleep. Where is comfort then?

We are not able to find a maid. For Dr Sarma and others good maids are easy to get. Their servants put up with all kinds of taunts from them. Then, why don't they work for us? We'd care for the servants better than they do. We'd pay them well. We'd talk more with them. While in conversation the topic of caste comes up and we have to mention ours. I am not able to understand why this is happening.

Still she hasn't come. Autos are coming and buses are coming. So many are alighting . . . but not she. I am getting agitated more and more. Do I need to take another B.P. tablet?

Psch! The doctor said I shouldn't wander far. How many problems with diabetes! The ECG has never been normal. I told him that I'd been taking medicines regularly. Even then he prohibits my going about long distances. Would not solve the

problem if I alone served and she kept home?

How would it be if mother and father came down here to stay with us? But they wouldn't. They'd come for a short stay once or twice in a year. Unable to do anything else we leave them to the TV and go about doing our jobs. No time even to talk to them at leisure. None around in the apartments would talk to them as neighbours would in the village. When we get back home, they are even afraid of opening the door for fear of thieves. In cities, burglaries and crimes are committed even in broad daylight. To play with the old ones, not even a child. Both of us waited to get married till securing employment and so... I'm getting worked up. The blowing of horns of vehicles. Dust is getting accumulated on my person waiting at the roadside.

Though I have a cell phone it is not with me now. What's the use? She must be calling again and again and getting a reply must be worrying. She must be cursing me - calling many and worrying about what she had to hear. . . . She grew up in Sati Savitri tradition always, now with her heart and mind

on me. The eldest daughter in their house saw to it that all her sisters got married and she wanted to remain a spinster. Then I met her. She thought spring had come into her life. She didn't know that it would turn into autumn. Why should she worry and suffer for me like this? She'd say that it'd be enough just to see me. I don't know whether it is her innocence or the nature of Love. In that case having a mobile phone and not using it ... how would she react? Get angry?

Thoughts were going on like this. ... An auto drew up near me. Two bags in hands, full of vegetables ... I heaved a sigh of relief. She saw me. I looked into her eyes looking a little distraught. I saw her pitifully, smiled. Raining jasmines, she approached me. I took the bags from her hands. "That's all... what more is to be desired ... if possible a few words ... if available a cup of coffee.." has been the ring tone I kept in my cell phone. I didn't know what to say. But in her eyes how much is that contentment! "If I so much look at you, I'd forget all tribulations. That's enough for this life", saying this, she climbed on to the pillion of my Hero Honda.